

A DOSSIER ON LUTRA (THE OTTER)

(269)

SUMMARY

Lutra, the otter, is a compact, powerful, intelligent animal capable of negotiating land, water, and obstacles with great facility. Lutra can survive in hostile environments such as under ice, in hot water, in raging seas, and even in urban environments. Capable of being easily trained and becomes devoted to humans which sometimes leads to its destruction. It can find its own food if necessary and can make long journeys routinely. Basic cost of animal moderate (\$75 - \$150) as is maintenance. Has been used by man as a pet and in the orient for fishing.

WHAT IS AN OTTER?

An otter is : Phylum : Chordata
Class : Mammalia
Order : Carnivora
Family : Mustelidae
Genus : Lutra
Species: Many species and sub-species.

There are two animals commonly called the 'otter' - specifically the Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*) and the land otter (*Lutra*).

The Sea Otter lives mostly at sea; is nearly extinct; and differs considerably from the land otters. For this reason our discussion will cover *Lutra*, the land otter. *

There are many species and subspecies of *Lutra*. *Lutra* lives all over the world in various forms. They may grow as large as small seals. In general *Lutra canadensis* is representative of most otters in size, physiology, habits, etc. For this reason the following dossier will but infrequently refer to species and subspecies of *Lutra*, the River Otter.

* Some taxonomists consider the Sea Otter to be so different from the Land or River Otter that it is considered to be a Sub-Family.

LOCOMOTION - LAND

Can run rapidly on land. In the wild ranges a territory over 50 miles. Will make night excursion of 15 miles. In one case was chased 28 miles by otter-hounds. Can climb stairs, ladder, and other objects easily. Ability to slide down inclines with ease.

LOCOMOTION - WATER

Must be taught to swim. Can swim 10 mph or faster. Can catch most fish easily. Dives to 60 feet and can stay submerged 4-6 minutes. Enters and leaves boat easily. Can be trained to catch fish. Sleeps floating on back. Will carry large fish (5-10 pounds) through the water.

ANATOMY - PHYSIOLOGY

LENGTH - 4-5 feet with 1 foot tail . Some varieties much longer.

WEIGHT - 25 pounds. (Sea otter 80 pounds.) Some Central American varieties as large as small seals.

FEET - Webbed. 5 toes on each foot. Claws good for climbing, but not for holding.Pads on toes capable of holding slippery eel.

Tracks: F $2\frac{1}{2}$ X 3, 5 ; H 3 X 3,5 (Lutra canadensis)

FUR - Durability - 100% Guard hairs with soft fur underneath. Outer hair holds water; surface tension holds them together to provide packing of under-fur to provide insulation. Some air held in fur.

DENTITION: C $\frac{1}{1}$, P $\frac{4}{3}$, M $\frac{1}{2}$

BODY TEMPERATURE: 38-39°C

LIFE CYCLE

Probably mates for life. Most species breed at any time of years, some in late February. Young born about 60 days later. Litter 1- 5 (cubs, kits, pups). Blind for 5 weeks. Weaned in 4 months. Both parents help in rearing animals. Small animals stay with parents one year.

Life span greater than 15 years.

FEEDING

Young animals can be bottle fed with same formula used for human babies. Diarrhea controlled by varying sugar and water in formula. Rub animals' gut with moistened finger to simulate licking of mother animal - this will substitute for peristalsis in young animals.

Wean as soon as possible to fish. Eels particularly good, but any fish will do. Will eat poultry, animal meat, eggs, and other high protein foods. (Other foods, however, do not seem to harm animal.)

Schedule feeding of young once per two hours and train to go overnight without feeding as soon as possible - just as with human baby. Mucus in stool normal.

Animal will catch own food and establish own preferences.

TRANSPORTING

Transporting an otter is exceptionally difficult. Animal resents restricted quarters and will fight and tear itself to destruction to escape. Tranquilizers are partially effective.

In like manner, once animal has enjoyed freedom equal to that of dog, it is difficult to keep it caged.

For transporting it is recommended that it travel with owner or else special care be taken to train animal to accept confined quarters (if possible). As last resort, rely on medication (tranquilizers / anesthesia).

No matter how brutal transporting can be (and other ways man inflicts pain on the otter) it never seems to resent this treatment.

GENERAL BEHAVIOR

SLEEPING: Usually sleeps on back with 'arms' folded.

Likes to sleep with humans. Will sleep all night although in the wild it can be nocturnal.

MANUAL AND ORAL DEXTERITY: Can open zipper, climb ladder, chew through zinc sheet, turn on water tap, carry stones and marbles - also larger objects, throw objects with head (from mouth), hold slippery objects, carry objects in 'arms' while swimming - also in mouth, will cover himself.

SWIMMING: Must learn to swim at early age. Has initial fear of water which must be overcome.

FEARS: Seems to show no interest and/or fear of cities, other animals (except very large birds such as eagles), jet (and other) aircraft, railroad stations, crowds of people, etc. Will fear water if not trained to it.

VOICE: Ranges from chirps to aspirations, sighs, "Hah", and a wail (from whimpering to rage).

MISCELLANEOUS DO'S AND DONT'S

1. Never take away food from otter - particularly that which he has just caught, or suffer severe mauling.
2. Never, if possible, confine (or leave in zoo or kennel) an otter which has enjoyed any human companionship or freedom.
3. Otters are very sensitive to some drugs which might be found in pesticides.
4. Do not panic when animal is in rough water, mountainous waves, or under ice.

INCIDENTAL (BUT CRITICAL AND USEFUL) INFORMATION

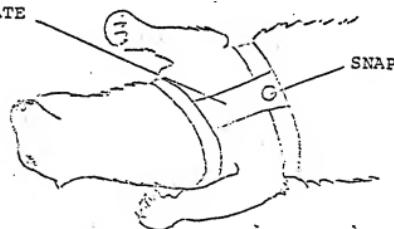
1. Has excellent sense of direction; can find air-holes under ice easily.
2. All otters are automatically housebroken.
3. Otters have no natural fear of man when young.
4. Has a tendency to 'ritualize' behavior (as do many animals). For example, some will chew 5 crunches on the left side of the mouth, then 5 crunches on the right, on and on; Will roll ball up and down stomach exactly the same way over and over again; Will rap door repetitive pattern; etc.
5. Can survive water hotter than human would care to bathe in.
6. Is very ticklish around the ribs (good way to distract stubborn otter).
7. Has good time sense (e.g. will wake up exactly at a certain time each morning).
8. Excrement (called 'spraint') has little or no odor.
9. Harness desireable 1) to keep in check in city and 2) to identify animal to hunters as being tame (in forest). (Special harness required - see page describing it).

AN OTTER HARNESS

Every otter should have a harness so that it can be better handled in the urban environment and so that it can be identified as a pet in the country environment (by hunters and others). The otter is lanky with a small head. For this reason a special harness must be built. Because the animal slides a lot, a 'breast-plate' is necessary. The design below was worked out by Maxwell. In only one case did he ever suspect that his animal became 'hung up' by his harness while roaming the countryside. Note that the straps are sufficiently tight allow some of the guard hairs to pass over it which reduces the chance of it being caught on objects.

MAXWELL OTTER HARNESS (LEATHER)

BREAST-PLATE

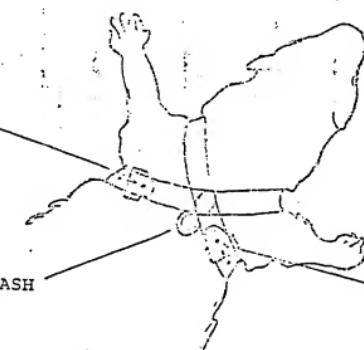


VENTRAL VIEW

BUCKLE

RING FOR LEASH

BUCKLE



DORSAL VIEW

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